



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: October 22, 2020

Agenda Item: Mount Jumbo WMA Forest Habitat Restoration Project, Region 2

Action Needed: Final **Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

Background: FWP proposes to conduct forest habitat restoration treatments on approximately 100 acres of the Mount Jumbo Wildlife Management Area (WMA), which is managed primarily to provide elk winter-range habitat. The objectives of the proposed treatments are to: increase forage potential on elk and deer winter range; promote stand conditions that would allow fire to burn at low-severity appropriate for the habitat type; and reduce fuel loading in the wildland urban interface. The treatments would involve the removal of conifer trees (both merchantable and submerchantable) through a combination of mechanical and non-mechanical treatments. If approved by the commission, the work could begin immediately.

FWP is coordinating this project with the Missoula Ranger District (Lolo National Forest, LNF), which is implementing similar treatments on its ongoing Marshall Woods Project on adjacent LNF lands. Similar treatments are also being planned on adjacent Missoula City land (administered by Missoula Parks & Recreation). The proposed treatments on the WMA complement these projects by reducing hazardous fuels at a larger scale as well as increasing forage potential on elk winter range.

Public Involvement Process & Results: A draft environmental assessment (EA) was made available for public review from July 24 to August 25, 2020. The EA was posted on FWP's website, and comments could be made on the webpage or submitted via mail or email. Legal notices were published once each in two newspapers, and a statewide news release was distributed. FWP sent seven printed copies of the EA and 67 emails of the EA's availability to adjacent landowners and interested individuals, groups, and agencies.

FWP received eight comments during the public review period—four from individuals and four from agencies/organizations (City of Missoula Parks & Recreation Department, Hellgate Hunters and Anglers [Missoula], Missoula Ranger District [Lolo National Forest] and Montana Wildlife Federation [Helena]). Individuals making comment included three from Missoula, and one who did not indicate location. All 8 commenters supported the proposed action, and no commenters were in opposition.

Alternatives and Analysis: If the proposed action were not taken, elk and deer winter range would continue to experience forest succession, which would trend toward increasing forest-canopy coverage, stressing water resources and shading out important grasses and deciduous vegetation. Hazardous fuels would continue to build up, which could increase the susceptibility of the forest to stand-replacement fire. In the absence of thinning, habitat diversity would also be expected to decline.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends the commission approve the proposed action to move forward with project implementation. The project would provide long-term benefits for sustaining and improving wildlife habitat on the WMA.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission approve this proposed forest habitat restoration project on Mount Jumbo WMA.